Chapter 3

COLLABORATIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

TOOLS

Where are we?

Teachers work independently on the routine tasks associated with teaching.

STRONGLY AGREE   AGREE   NOT SURE   DISAGREE   STRONGLY DISAGREE

Teachers choose the professional development that interests them.

STRONGLY AGREE   AGREE   NOT SURE   DISAGREE   STRONGLY DISAGREE

Professional development involves teachers working in teams to improve teaching and students' learning.

STRONGLY AGREE   AGREE   NOT SURE   DISAGREE   STRONGLY DISAGREE

Teachers typically attend professional development away from school.

STRONGLY AGREE   AGREE   NOT SURE   DISAGREE   STRONGLY DISAGREE

As schools strive to improve their bottom line, more and more are using profesional development as their primary intervention. Yet, decades of practice in professional learning have demonstrated little long-term impact on teaching or student learning. This may be because beliefs about what good professional development is are shifting. Research is pointing to the relationship between teachers working in learning communities and improvement in student learning. *"Researchers point to an 'emerging consensus' regarding the kind of professional development most likely to improve teacher practice and thus student performance. This consensus suggests that the highest impact professional development directly relates to the instructional content and material teachers must use, takes place in their own schools and classrooms with coaching and ongoing feedback, and seeks to involve all teachers so that the activity emphasizes schoolwide as compared to just individual capacity"* (Burney, D., Corcoran T., & Lesnick, J., in press; Elmore, R, 2002; Garet, M., Porter, A., Desimone, L., Birman, B., & Yoon, K., 2001)" (Miles, K.H., Odden, A., Fermanich, M., & Archibald, S. 2005, p. 9).

> Collaborative professional learning is a form of professional development in which teachers work together to improve teaching and learning. It has several attributes that distinguish it from other forms of professional learning. Collaborative professional learning engages teachers in teams that work together over time to improve teaching and learning.

Until the last decade, professional development was viewed as a matter of personal preference for teachers. This approach to professi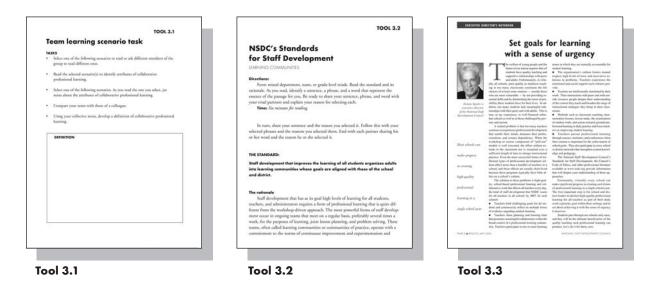onal development produces few long-term changes in teaching behavior or results for students. However, this approach to professional development is so common a practice in school districts that moving beyond it to consider a different approach is challenging.

Professional development, until recently, was not viewed as a means for improving teaching and learning. Other means such as curriculum, assessment, materials, programs, and school structures took priority over professional development as vehicles for improvement in early school reform efforts. Now, the significance of professional development is clear; yet what is also clear is that the past practices of professional development will not improve schools. Dennis Sparks, executive director of the National Staff Development Council, summarizes both the importance of professional development and the particular form of professional development that will improve student learning:

"If every student is to have a competent teacher, then virtually all their teachers must be learning virtually all the time. While that learning will occasionally happen in workshops and courses, most of it will occur as teachers

Tool 3.1

Tool 3.2

Tool 3.3

plan lessons together, examine their students' work to find ways to improve it, observe one another teach, and plan improvements based on various data. Those of us concerned about teacher expertise must take leadership in designing such a system for learning" (Sparks, 1998, p. 2).

Tool 3.1 is useful in helping educators understand the attributes of collaborative professional learning. By working through the inquiry-based activity outlined in Tool 3.1, educators can picture how collaborative professional learning might look in their school. Teams, of course, have the freedom to create their own concept of collaborative professional learning provided these key features are all evident:

- Creating support for teams of teachers;
- Working together over time;
- Constructing joint work related to curriculum, assessment, and instruction; and
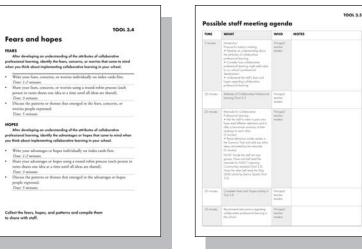- Improving teaching and learning.

Collaborative professional learning, according to Mike Schmoker, is "the best, least expensive, most professionally rewarding way to improve schools" (Schmoker, 2005, p. 137). It is the practice of educators working together to solve problems, and design and refine instruction, curriculum, assessments, and interventions for student learning. Using successful practices long present in business and industry such as quality circles, collaborative professional learning brings teachers together most often within their school to co-construct knowledge, share knowledge, and distribute knowledge about teaching and learning throughout the school.

Fred Newmann and Gary Wehlage (1995) identified factors of schools that achieve disproportionately

higher student performance in math, science, and social studies. These schools had staff members who formed learning communities, focused their attention on student work and assessment, and changed their instructional practices to improve their results with students. Common goals, consistent messages about learning objectives and methods, and collective responsibility, say Newmann and Wehlage, increase teacher efficacy. In addition, they believe that teachers' collaborative activity increases their technical competence and collective responsibility.

"Collaborative activity can enhance teachers' technical competence. As teachers work with students from increasingly diverse social backgrounds, and as the curriculum begins to demand more intellectual rigor, teachers require information, technical expertise, and social-emotional support far beyond the resources they can muster as individuals working alone. When teachers collaborate productively, they participate in reflective dialogue to learn more about professional issues; they observe and react to one another's teaching, curriculum, and assessment practices; and they engage in joint planning and curriculum development. By enriching teachers' technical and social resources, collaboration can make teaching more effective.

"[C]learly shared purpose and collaboration contribute to collective responsibility: one's colleagues share responsibility for the quality of all students' achievement. This norm helps to sustain each teacher's commitment. A culture of collective responsibility puts more peer pressure and accountability on staff who may not have carried their fair share, but it can also ease the burden on teachers who have worked hard in isolation but who felt unable to help some students. In short, professional community within the

teaching staff sharpens the educational focus and enhances the technical and social support that teachers need to be successful" (Newmann and Wehlage, 1995, p. 31).

Collaborative professional learning engages teachers in job-embedded, results-driven, and standards-based learning. New Jersey's Professional Development Standards advocate for professional development that engages teachers in "collegial and collaborative dialogue." The National Staff Development Council's Standards for Staff Development (2001) advocates for professional learning that organizes teachers in learning communities whose goals are aligned with those of the school and district. Tool 3.2 includes the rationale for NSDC's Learning Communities Standard. This rationale is a brief synthesis of the research and can be useful to help staff members understand the value of collaborative professional learning.

Shirley Hord and a team of researchers from Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) studied professional learning communities in 22 schools.

As a result of their research, they identified five themes that served as the characteristics of teachers learning together in collaborative teams:

"Supportive and shared leadership requires that collegial and facilitative participation of the principal who shares leadership — and thus, power and authority —- by inviting staff input and action in decision making.

- *Shared values and vision include an unwavering commitment to student learning that is consistently articulated and referenced in the staff's work.*
- *Collective learning and application of learning requires that school staff at all levels are engaged in processes that collectively seek new knowledge among staff and application of the learning to solutions that address students' needs.*
- *Supportive conditions include physical and human capacities that encourage and sustain a collegial atmosphere and collective learning.*
- *Shared practice involves the review of a teacher's behavior by colleagues and includes feedback and assistance activity to support individual and community improvement"* (Hord, p. 7).

Tool 3.4

Tool 3.5

When teachers are working and learning together, they improve both their practice and their students' learning. This form of professional development differs from typical professional development in a number of ways.

Collaborative professional learning is:

- Frequent/ongoing;
- Done during contract time;
- Done with teaching colleagues;
- Supports current classroom work and personal professional development goals, and school improvement goals;
- Designed by teachers;
- Facilitated by teachers and teacher leaders and/or co-facilitated by school-based and district-based educators;
- Supported and monitored by school administrators; and
- Contextually appropriate to the needs of the students, teachers, and school community.

This tool kit assists schools and teachers in linking professional learning to teachers' routine work by recognizing that collaborating about curriculum, assessment, instruction, and student learning is a legitimate form of professional development. Teachers will find that they more easily, quickly, and satisfactorily meet the requirement for 100 hours of professional development because the work that they have traditionally done in isolation will be done with the value-added of their colleagues' thinking. When teachers work collaboratively on their routine work and reflect on and continuously improve their practice, they will be driven less by the desire to earn 100 hours and more by the satisfaction

they feel when they see the results of their learning.

Teachers from New Jersey to California who have committed to work in communities of learners report that while getting started requires an investment, they find the rewards to be significant. They report that their work is more satisfying, that they save time because they are sharing responsibility with their peers, that their work is more focused, and that they would not return to the way they previously worked in isolation. Schools in which teachers work in collaborative teams make steady progress toward their improvement goals, have a clear focus, share goals, and produce results.

Collaborative professional learning will look different in large and small schools. In large schools, there are likely to be more teams and maybe bigger teams meeting. Teachers are more likely to serve on more than one collaborative team. The role of the principal, teacher leaders, and/or supervisors in coordinating and supporting the teams will be greater. Communication between and among teams will be more challenging and require more concerted effort. Creating a sense of community may be more challenging in a larger school where teachers do not work as closely together, although this is not necessarily a factor related to size. It is more closely connected to the culture within a school. Even large schools can have highly successful collaborative professional learning teams, as demonstrated by Adlai Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Ill., a school of more than 4,000 students.

Once a week, teachers at Stevenson High School arrive at their regular time at 7:45 a.m. and students arrive late. Teachers use this block of time each week to meet in their collaborative teams often by department or course areas.

Adlai Stevenson High School's late-start schedule

Period	Time
1	10:30 - 11:05 a.m.
2	11:10 - 11:40 a.m.
3	11:45 - 12:15 p.m.
4	12:20 - 12:55 p.m.
5	1 - 1:35 p.m.
6	1:40 - 2:15 p.m.
7	2:20 - 2:50 p.m.
8	2:55 - 3:25 p.m.

In smaller schools, teachers may serve on cross-level teams or interdisciplinary teams. Because teachers know each other better in smaller schools, teams are likely to

Video resources

These help educators "see" collaborative professional learning in action.

• Critical friends groups in action. Annenberg Institute for School Reform.
www.annenberginstitute.org.

• Designing and evaluating professional development for increased student learning. The School Improvement Network.
www.schoolimprovementnetwork.com.

• Let's talk about PLC: Getting started (three parts). National Educational Services
www.solution-tree.com.

• Looking at student work: A window into the classroom. Annenberg Institute for School Reform.
www.annenberginstitute.org.

• Looking at teacher work: Standards in practice. Collaborative Communications Group.
www.publicengagement.com.

• Schools that learn: High standards for teacher and principal performance. Collaborative Communications Group.
www.publicengagement.com.

• Whole faculty study groups: Collaboration targeting student learning. The School Improvement Network.
www.schoolimprovementnetwork.com.

become more productive more quickly. The principal may be able to be a member of all the teams in a smaller school. Certainly communication between and among teams will be easier. Creating a supportive culture may be easier because staff members are more likely to have a sense of community in a smaller school.

Regardless of the size of the school, however, the process for creating teams is the same. The type of work teams do remains the same. The difference is the focus on multiple grades, courses, or core content areas rather than a single one.

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TOOL 3.1

Team learning scenario task

TASKS

- Select one of the following scenarios to read or ask different members of the group to read different ones.

- Read the selected scenario(s) to identify attributes of collaborative professional learning.

- Select one of the following scenarios. As you read the one you select, jot notes about the attributes of collaborative professional learning.

- Compare your notes with those of a colleague.

- Using your collective notes, develop a definition of collaborative professional learning.

DEFINITION

SCENARIO 1

SCHOOL-BASED COLLABORATIVE
LEARNING: Fremont Elementary
School 4th-grade teachers

The school year starts on a very different note at Fremont Elementary School. Instead of the normal large school professional development day that involves a presentation, Frieda Jackson leads the teachers through an analysis of student achievement. The meeting lasts all morning, as teachers dig through various data sets and work in a variety of different configurations to learn how their students performed on state tests. At the end of the meeting, teachers begin to think about some actions the school will take.

The afternoon is set aside for each grade level to repeat the process looking specifically at data about incoming students. Jackson, with the help of the district testing specialist, prepared data for the grade levels as a whole and for each teacher for his or her new class. The expectation for the afternoon is that each grade level works as a team looking to create a specific plan about what they will do during the year to improve student performance.

Fremont's 4th-grade teachers spend their two hours of the afternoon talking about their incoming class of 4th graders. They study the composite and content-specific scores from these new 4th graders' performance on the 3rd-grade tests. They also look at the scores of students divided into their new classrooms. Teachers use a simple data analysis protocol that Jackson gave them in the morning to study the data. They identify the strengths and apparent weaknesses in reading, writing, and math sub-skill areas.

They make a list of their observations on a large piece of chart paper. As they are about to choose a focus area, Jackson stops by and asks how things are going. She expresses her appreciation for the team's efforts last year and notes the significant improvement the 4th

graders made on the state tests. As she is talking with the teachers, she reads over the chart they have made identifying areas of focus. Jackson smiles when she sees writing on the list. She, too, knows that it is an area of need. It is clear that these incoming 4th graders are making substantial progress in reading and math, yet are not doing well in writing.

Jackson gets up to leave indicating that she wants to visit other teams. As she leaves, she reminds them that their plan is due on Friday and that she is available to assist. Walking out of the room toward the 5th-grade pod, Jackson ponders, "It will be interesting to see what they decide to focus on this year. I hope it is writing. I know it is their choice. If they have done a thorough data analysis, they will see that writing is the appropriate focus area. I trust them to make a good decision, and if it isn't the right one, they discover that on their own. They have always worked well as a team."

After Jackson leaves, the team decides to make writing a focus for their collaborative work while also continuing to improve students' reading and math scores. They make a plan for the first several weeks related to writing. Their plan includes giving a writing assessment within the first three days of school, scoring a select sample of those together at their next professional development meeting, and developing lesson plans to address the specific areas of deficit. They decide not to pursue a recommendation by one team member to use cross-classroom flexible grouping until they see for themselves how their students perform. They also decide which books to read aloud to students in the first week of school that best represent the use of figurative language. Together, they craft some possible questions to ask, and one member volunteers to type them up and e-mail to everyone.

They agree to meet each Tuesday and Thursday during their team planning time to continue their discussions about how to improve student writing. At their next professional development day meeting, they plan to bring their writing samples for scoring and analysis to identify areas in which to concentrate. By the end of

the first week of school, they hope to complete their analysis so they can begin planning specific instruction related to major deficits in student writing.

The grade-level chair asks for a volunteer to help her prepare the grade-level's plan for Jackson that is due on Friday. The plan asks the team to identify their area of focus, a SMART goal related to this goal, three benchmark points along the way, ways they will assess student performance at these benchmark points, and the action they will take to achieve the goals. All the teachers agree to stay and help develop the plan. They worry that it will not be as complete, and the chair reminds them that they can change it when they have a better idea of specific actions they want to take and have decided how to assess student performance in writing at three points in the year. She says she will talk with Jackson about this being a draft plan and let them know if Jackson expresses any concerns.

When the grade-level chair meets with Jackson to review the draft plan, Jackson assures her that the plan is a living document and that she hopes they will continue to review and refine it throughout the year. She also helps revise the goal so that it includes all the elements of a SMART goal (S=specific, M=measurable, A=attainable, R=results-driven, T=time bound) and offers some possible actions for the team to consider when they get to the action planning part of their plan. Jackson shares a copy of the 2nd-grade plan because they, too, have identified writing.

SCENARIO 2

SCHOOL-BASED COLLABORATIVE LEARNING: Peterson High School science department

The curriculum coach at Peterson High School meets with science teachers to talk about ways to reduce the poor performance of female and underrepresented students in that discipline. Teachers, too, express frustration because they had recognized that students in upper-level courses were mostly white and Asian males. As they discussed possible reasons for the situation, the coach asks teachers how they differentiate instruction and materials, how they link students' background knowledge when they introduce concepts, and about students' readiness for high school science. Teachers identify issues related to students' motivation, high absenteeism, lack of basic study skills, and general lack of interest in science.

Teachers agree there are some significant issues to study. They agree to use their professional development time to gather data and examine the problem they identify as underenrollment of underrepresented students (mostly blacks and Hispanic) and female students in upper-level science courses. This problem becomes the focus of a four-month inquiry by the science teachers that involves the curriculum coach, counselors, the district's science specialist, the assistant principal for curriculum and instruction, the school's reading specialist, and a physical education teacher.

First, the coach suggests teachers ask the counselor to gather data about students who fall into their four identified groups of interest — female students who are successful in upper-level science classes; blacks and Hispanic male students who are successful in upper-level science classes; and students of both groups who have performed poorly in basic science classes and choose not to enroll in other science classes. Teachers want to compare how students in each group perform in other classes, their attendance, how many hours they are employed outside of school, if they participate in extracurricular activities, their scores on the achievement tests given in 10th grade, etc.

The coach works with the department on one of their professional development days to analyze the data. Teachers discover some interesting patterns in the data. On the next professional development meeting day, they invite the assistant principal, counselor, reading specialist, and district science specialist to discuss the patterns they found. Basically, they found no difference among the students who attended school more regularly and those who did not. Involvement in extracurricular activities gave them little insight into student performance. They found no significant differences between those who work outside of school. Analysis of the achievement tests were not particularly helpful except to tell them what they already knew — some students perform better than others.

But one finding does stand out: students who perform poorly in basic science perform poorly in other classes, especially classes involving a great deal of reading and writing. The same students perform much better in classes that require more physical activity or creative expression such as physical education, family and consumer science, some technology classes, drama, art, and music. Teachers begin to understand that there might be something about the type of learner they are dealing with that they want to study further.

The physics teacher says he wants to learn whether using different instructional processes can change how students learn. He volunteers to try to recreate an upcoming unit using more physical activities if he can figure out what to do. Other teachers point out that, while he has a good idea, the students in the current physics class are not the students they worry about. Two teachers of Introduction to Science ask if they might work with the physics teacher to develop a unit that they would teach. All agree that this would be a solid action research project. Other teachers want to join the planning team.

A team of about seven teachers meets at their next professional development block to figure out how to teach resistance. They decide to invite a physical education teacher to help them figure out what kinds of physical activities they might engage students in to demonstrate the concept of resistance. She gladly joins them and works with them to create activities to help students develop an understanding of resistance. After the unit is designed, one Introduction to Science teacher agrees to teach it first. The physics teacher and the other Introduction to Science teacher ask the assistant principal to arrange coverage of their classes so they can observe the first two days of the unit.

During lunch after each class, the three teachers debrief what occurred, how they would tweak what they designed for their students, and begin to think about how they would know if students really understand the concept. On the third day of the unit, other science teachers and the physical education teacher request a report on how the unit is progressing. They agree that debriefing the unit will be the focus of their next professional development block.

To prepare for that meeting, the Introduction to Science teacher takes pictures of her students in class, gathers some of their notes and work, and charts the results of the unit test. She wants to talk about two students in particular, students in their target group who had failing grades before the unit and who aced the work on resistance. The assistant principal also provides two short articles on multiple intelligences and differentiation to share with the science teachers. The physics teacher agrees to facilitate the meeting and set the agenda.

When teachers leave the meeting, they agree that this form of collaboration is essential to help them learn how to alter their instruction to meet the needs of learners who are not typically successful in science. They know that if they work together more often they will be able to help more students succeed in science. They acknowledge that their instructional practices often do not accommodate learners who are different than the majority of the teachers. They appreciate the expertise of the physical education teacher and acknowledge that cross-departmental collaboration is critical. And, they identify the next problem they want to tackle as a department — the high rate of failure in chemistry — even though they have a long way to go to revamp all their instruction to incorporate different strategies to

engage students. The physical education teacher sits quietly as the decision is made. She is already thinking about how to use physical movement to help students understand electrons, molecules, nuclei, and the periodic chart.

The principal meets with the department chair after the debriefing meeting and asks that they make increasing the number of female and underrepresented students in upper-level classes, decreasing the failure rate in all science classes, and improving the performance of students in science on the state achievement test the department goals for the next two years to sustain the work they began and to expand it.

SCENARIO 3

SCHOOL-BASED TEAM LEARNING:
Martin Middle School

The 8th-grade test scores are back and as usual the 7th-grade teachers hear the 8th-grade teachers voicing the same excuse they have for the last five years: Entering 8th graders are unprepared so they must reteach the 7th-grade curriculum which leaves little time to teach the 8th-grade curriculum. Each year, the story is the same.

Seventh-grade teachers acknowledge that they have the highest failure rate of all grades in the middle school. They attribute this to their high expectations and to the fact that they are helping students learn to be responsible for their actions — an important life skill. They know that if they do not help students realize that they are responsible for their own success or failure and how to face the consequences of their actions, the high failure rate will continue. If 7th graders fail to learn that lesson now, they will be in serious trouble in high school. Because this is an important learning, 7th-grade teachers have agreed to be less lenient on work that is late, incomplete, or poor quality. The lack of leniency leads to higher failures, and those are logical consequences students face. Seventh-grade teachers prefer that students experience those failures now rather than in high school.

Each year, Theresa Sanchez, the principal at Martin, has talked with team leaders about the number of failures in 7th grade. Yet, she agrees that she has not taken specific actions to address the issue. She can no longer avoid the issues because she recognizes that it contributes to ill feelings between 7th- and 8th-grade teachers. She decides to act and asks both the 7th- and 8th-grade team leaders to meet with her after school on Tuesday.

At the meeting Tuesday, Sanchez expresses her concern about the increasing ill feeling between 8th- and 7th-grade teachers. She shares some data to support her conclusion. She also indicates the school must address its low 8th-grade performance on the state test or face sanctions. She invites the team leaders to be part the solution

Sanchez lays out a plan to form a new professional learning community to address this problem. She asks the team leaders to identify people to serve on the team. She listens as they talk about including a counselor and at least one 6th-grade teacher, and equal representation from 7th and 8th grade. Sanchez asks if including a parent or student would be helpful. They decide that it would not be advantageous now, but reserve the right to include students and parents as information sources later.

Sanchez asks the team leaders to select one representative from each grade to be facilitators of the team. She also indicates she will provide some released time so the new team can have a half-day meeting to initiate their work and offers to help the facilitators plan the agenda. She expresses a desire to be a member of the team.

At the first meeting, the new team of volunteers assembles — three 7th- and three 8th -grade teachers, a 6th-grade teacher, the 7th -grade counselor, the school social worker, and Sanchez. The two facilitators engage the members in a team building activity to introduce team members to each other and to help them understand the purpose of this new learning community. The team hears the history of what brought them to this point.

Then the counselor shares data about student academic performance. He presents absentee rates, state test performance for 8th graders, CAT test scores for 6th graders, grade distributions for each grade, repeater numbers, and parent and student climate survey results. The facilitators shares a protocol for examining the data. Team members divide into teams of two and each pair takes two sets of data and analyzes the data.

The team identifies several patterns within the data and begins to discuss these patterns across pairs. The facilitators ask the pairs to share their findings and to

chart them. When each pair has reported out, they exchange data sets with another team and repeat the process so that two teams of two review each data set. Additional findings are added to the chart begun by the first team.

The first meeting ends with a long list of findings. The facilitators ask each team member to share the findings with their respective grade level and to discuss which they believe may be the greatest contributor to 8th graders' performance on the state tests. They will use this input at their next meeting to plan a course of action.

SCENARIO 4

CROSS-SCHOOL TEAM SCENARIO:
West Grove Township School District

Teachers had mixed reactions when the West Grove superintendent began talking about transforming professional development days into weekly time for professional collaboration. Some teachers loved the idea; some were less enthusiastic. Some who were less than enthusiastic included teachers of singleton academic courses within their schools or non-instructional staff. They did not understand how school-based collaborative learning teams would benefit them.

Laureen Garibaldi is the only Calculus instructor at West Grove High School. She really appreciates the idea of transforming professional development into something that would be more valuable to her, but wonders who will be on her team since she is the only Calculus teacher. She discovers that other singleton teachers, some elective teachers, the school's two counselors, the media specialist, and some of the special education staff have similar questions.

She talks with the principal about the district's plans for teachers like her. She is delighted to hear that she will create a team with her counterpart in the other high school. She learns that the plan includes asking each of them to meet at one another's schools during the same time teachers in their own schools will be meeting with teachers at their own schools. She knows the travel time will reduce their meeting time but she is grateful that her team will focus specifically on the content of Calculus and looks forward to sharing lesson ideas, developing common assessments, and units with the other high school's Calculus teacher.

When the collaborative professional learning teams begin in January on their professional development day, Garibaldi joins Ben Simpson, the other high school's

Calculus teacher, during the district's half-day training on the essential skills for collaborative teams. In the afternoon, teachers meet in their teams to discuss how to set up their teams, types of data to study, and where they will hold their bi-weekly meetings.

At their afternoon meeting, Garibaldi and Simpson set a schedule for their meetings, identify where they will meet, and then discuss what they will bring to their first meeting. High school math teachers do not have formal, standardized student achievement data other than math scores on SATs, ACTs, and Advanced Placement scores. They agree to bring these data to their next meeting to see what they can discern about students' math achievement in their district and respective schools.

At the next meeting, after pouring through the data, they discover some discrepancies in student performance. At Simpson's school, students do much better than they do in Garibaldi's school. Garibaldi recognizes that the problem could lie anywhere and engages Simpson to help her figure it out.

To their next meeting, they both bring the district curriculum documents, the state's core curriculum content standards for math and the texts they are each using and used in other advanced-level math classes. They make a huge wall matrix on chart paper and identify where each math standard is referenced in the district curriculum and in their respective texts. Their 100-minute meeting is over before they know it. Both agree that they want to spend more time looking at how the standards are addressed in each of the core science classes and texts. They both realize that they need far more time and some help for their colleagues who teach other advanced-level math classes. They schedule their next meeting and agree to invite one or two other math teachers from each of their schools to join them. They complete their mandatory team log and talk about what they want to accomplish at the next meeting.

At their next meeting, Garibaldi, Simpson, and their colleagues complete the math course map that identifies where each standard is addressed and deter-

mine where each standard's mastery is expected. They uncover some discrepancies in the content of courses between the schools. Simpson devotes more attention to integrating standards while Garibaldi is more focused on completing the text. They also find glaring gaps in Garibaldi's textbook. For example, several standards are addressed briefly or not at all.

For the next three months, their meetings focus on understanding where each math standard is taught in the high school math curriculum, sequencing the knowledge and skills included in each, and ultimately determining the specific courses in which math knowledge and skills embedded in the standards are introduced, developed, and mastered so they have a comprehensive scope and sequence within the high school math curriculum. This work has given them a deeper understanding of the content and places where they can expect students to need more instruction. By becoming content experts, they recognize how to help students master the standards. After eight meetings, they feel they have achieved a great accomplishment because they have developed a curriculum that reflects a logical sequence of their curriculum standards. Next, they agree to design common assessments for Calculus that will assess students' mastery of the standards, not just the textbook content.

TOOL 3.2

NSDC's Standards for Staff Development

LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Directions:

Form mixed department, team, or grade-level triads. Read the standard and its rationale. As you read, identify a sentence, a phrase, and a word that represent the essence of the passage for you. Be ready to share your sentence, phrase, and word with your triad partners and explain your reason for selecting each.

Time: *Six minutes for reading.*

In turn, share your sentence and the reason you selected it. Follow this with your selected phrases and the reasons you selected them. End with each partner sharing his or her word and the reason he or she selected it.

THE STANDARD:

Staff development that improves the learning of all students organizes adults into learning communities whose goals are aligned with those of the school and district.

The rationale

Staff development that has as its goal high levels of learning for all students, teachers, and administrators requires a form of professional learning that is quite different from the workshop-driven approach. The most powerful forms of staff development occur in ongoing teams that meet on a regular basis, preferably several times a week, for the purposes of learning, joint lesson planning, and problem solving. These teams, often called learning communities or communities of practice, operate with a commitment to the norms of continuous improvement and experimentation and

engage their members in improving their daily work to advance the achievement of school district and school goals for student learning.

Learning teams may be of various sizes and serve different purposes. For instance, the faculty as a whole may meet once or twice a month to reflect on its work, engage in appropriate learning, and assess its progress. In addition, some members of the faculty may serve on school improvement teams or committees that focus on the goals and methods of schoolwide improvement. While these teams make important contributions to school culture, learning environment and other priority issues, they do not substitute for the day-to-day professional conversations focused on instructional issues that are the hallmark of effective learning communities. Learning teams meet almost every day and concern themselves with practical ways to improve teaching and learning. Members of learning communities take collective responsibility for the learning of all students repre-

sented by team members. Teacher members of learning teams, which consist of four to eight members, assist one another in examining the standards students are required to master, planning more effective lessons, critiquing student work, and solving the common problems of teaching.

The teams determine areas in which additional learning would be helpful and read articles, attend workshops or courses, or invite consultants to assist them in acquiring necessary knowledge or skills. In addition to the regular meetings, participants observe one another in the classroom and conduct other job-related responsibilities. Learning communities are strengthened when other support staff, administrators, and even school board members choose to participate and when communication is facilitated between teams. Because of this common focus and clear direction, problems of fragmentation and incoherence that typically thwart school improvement efforts are eliminated.

Set goals for learning with a sense of urgency

Dennis Sparks is executive director of the National Staff Development Council

Most schools can

make progress

in creating

high-quality

professional

learning in a

single school year.

The welfare of young people and the future of our nation requires that *all* students have quality teaching and supportive relationships with peers and adults. Unfortunately, in virtually all schools, poor quality or mediocre teaching in too many classrooms constrains the life choices of at least some students — usually those who are most vulnerable — by not providing essential skills and by diminishing the sense of possibility these students have for their lives. In addition, too many students lack meaningful relationships with their peers and with adults. This is true, in my experience, in well-financed suburban schools as well as in those challenged by poverty and racism.

A related problem is that too many teachers continue to experience professional development that numbs their minds, demeans their professionalism, and creates dependency. When the workshop or course component of "pull-out" models is well executed, the effort seldom extends to the classroom nor is sustained over a sufficient length of time to change instructional practice. Even the most successful forms of traditional types of professional development seldom affect more than a handful of teachers in a school, and those effects are usually short-lived because these programs typically have little affect on a school's culture.

The solution to these problems is high-quality, school-based professional learning and collaborative work that affects all teachers every day, the kind of staff development that NSDC wants for all teachers in all schools by 2007. In such schools:

■   Teachers hold challenging goals for all students and continuously reflect on multiple forms of evidence regarding student learning.

■   Teachers share planning and learning time that promotes meaningful collaboration within the broad context of a professional learning community. Teachers participate in one or more learning teams in which they are mutually accountable for student learning.

■   The organization's culture fosters mutual respect, high levels of trust, and innovative solutions to problems. Teachers experience the emotional and social support such cultures provide.

■   Teachers are intellectually stimulated by their work. Their interactions with peers and with outside resource people deepen their understanding of the content they teach and broaden the range of instructional strategies they bring to their classrooms.

■   Methods such as classroom coaching, demonstration lessons, lesson study, the examination of student work, and action research ground professional learning in daily practice and focus teachers on improving student learning.

■   Teachers pursue professional learning through courses, institutes, and conferences when their content is important for the achievement of school goals. They also participate in cross-school or district networks that strengthen content knowledge and pedagogy.

The National Staff Development Council's Standards for Staff Development, the Council's Code of Ethics, and other professional literature available at www.nsdc.org provide information that will deepen your understanding of these approaches.

Fortunately, virtually every school can make significant progress in creating such forms of professional learning in a single school year. The first important step is for school and district leaders to declare high-quality professional learning for all teachers as part of their daily work a priority goal within their settings and to set about achieving it with the sense of urgency it deserves.

Students pass through our schools only once, and they will be the ultimate beneficiaries of the quality teaching such professional learning can produce. Let's do it for them, now.

TOOL 3.4

Fears and hopes

FEARS

After developing an understanding of the attributes of collaborative professional learning, identify the fears, concerns, or worries that come to mind when you think about implementing collaborative learning in your school.

- Write your fears, concerns, or worries individually on index cards first.
  Time: 1-2 minutes.
- Share your fears, concerns, or worries using a round-robin process (each person in turns shares one idea at a time until all ideas are shared).
  Time: 3 minutes.
- Discuss the patterns or themes that emerged in the fears, concerns, or worries people expressed.
  Time: 5 minutes.

HOPES

After developing an understanding of the attributes of collaborative professional learning, identify the advantages or hopes that come to mind when you think about implementing collaborative learning in your school.

- Write your advantages or hopes individually on index cards first.
  Time: 1-2 minutes.
- Share your advantages or hopes using a round-robin process (each person in turns shares one idea at a time until all ideas are shared).
  Time: 3 minutes.
- Discuss the patterns or themes that emerged in the advantages or hopes people expressed.
  Time: 5 minutes.

Collect the fears, hopes, and patterns and compile them to share with staff.

Possible staff meeting agenda *Total time: 85 minutes*

TIME	WHAT	WHO	NOTES
5 minutes	Introduction Purpose for today's meeting: • Develop an understanding about the attributes of collaborative professional learning. • Consider how collaborative professional learning might add value to our school's professional development. • Understand the staff's fears and hopes regarding collaborative professional learning.	Principal/ teacher leaders	
30 minutes	Attributes of collaborative professional learning	Principal/ teacher leaders	
20 minutes	Rationale for collaborative professional learning • Ask the staff to meet in pairs according to the different selections they have read and to offer a two-minute summary of their readings to each other. *(5 minutes)* • Revisit definitions written earlier in the Team Learning Scenario Task (Tool 3.1) and add any other ideas stimulated by the rationale. *(3 minutes)* NOTE: Divide the staff into two groups. Have one half read the rationale for NSDC's Learning Communities standard (Tool 3.2). Have the other half read the May 2004 article by Dennis Sparks (Tool 3.3).	Principal/ teacher leaders	
20 minutes	Complete Fears and Hopes activity (Tool 3.4).	Principal/ teacher leaders	
10 minutes	Recommend next actions regarding collaborative professional learning in the school.	Principal/ teacher leaders	